

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE ARAB REFUGEES?

A Bolder Stratagem Is Needed

HAL LEHRMAN

ALITTLE over a year ago, in the latter half of a five-month journey through the Arab world from Morocco to the border of Iran, this reporter began coming across many Palestinian Arab refugees in various places and conditions. With some of them he sipped coffee and chatted in Cairo villas and Beirut hotels—the rich ones, their money stowed in foreign banks. He encountered a number of others, poor but enterprising, who had made it all the way to Baghdad, where they found work and a fresh beginning in booming Iraq. But it was the destitute and the rootless, the big majority scattered around Israel's periphery from Gaza to Amman, who occupied most of his attention—as, intermittently, they have occupied the world's attention since 1949. With a new General Assembly debate on refugees looming, there is a fresh spurt of public interest in the lot of the Palestinian Arabs.

I saw these refugees in many different places: at the edge of Damascus, in a cluster of dismal huts on a muddy field athwart St. Paul's Wall—where for nine years now Palestinians, by the transparently malevolent design of the Syrian authorities, have been squatting in explosive proximity to an ancient ghetto packed with the remnants of Damascene Jewry; I saw them rioting in the streets of Amman; I saw them in camps lying under the muzzled cannon of Arab Legion tanks as I drove up and down the hills of Moab into the Jordanian sector of

Jerusalem; I saw them in refugee centers in Lebanon just outside rich and bustling Beirut. What I learned and noted may still be pertinent to the current discussion despite the intervening months.

ONE of the Lebanese camps was designated as a "bad camp" because of its ramshackle primitiveness, another as a "good camp" because it had a new suggestion of permanence about it—solid stone buildings, a tidy school and clinic, a pattern of streets—and was beginning to look like a proper village. But, bad or good, both were strangely alike in their political attitudes. Residents of the first camp did not seem any more eager than those of the other to escape their plight by trying anything, even resettlement; residents of the second camp seemed no less obdurate than those of the first on the necessity of "going home" to Palestine.

In fact, the views audible at every refugee center—as well as the opinions heard in Damascus street interviews, and in Amman coffee houses on days when no riots were afoot—were as alike as products of a machine. One came away with at least two plausible impressions: that the refugees were deriving their ideas and "information" from common or controlled sources; and that they were being systematically cut off from knowledge of any fact which might diminish a diehard determination to "go home."

Shatila, populated mainly by refugees from Western Galilee, was described to me as the "worst" of six camps in the Beirut area. Its inmates were getting services identical with those of the other centers: basic rations for all, a daily cup of milk for every child under fifteen; one hot meal daily for the pregnant, the sick, and the undernourished; a clinic with attendant nurse and visiting doctor; elementary schools and adult education programs inside the camp; and access to Beirut hospitals for the seriously ill, with specialists and surgeons available. But the

MUCH of the material for this discussion of the Arab refugees was gathered by HAL LEHRMAN during an extensive tour of the Middle East last year. That trip resulted in a series of articles which appeared in COMMENTARY throughout 1956, and which helped earn Mr. Lehrman the George Polk Memorial Award for "distinguished achievement in journalism." Mr. Lehrman is well known both as writer and lecturer.

face and form of the camp itself were undeniably wretched. According to the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) aide who accompanied me, the place "sheltered" 370 families: a total of 1,435 souls, including 787 children, distributed in 30 tents and 328 earthen-floor huts—the latter erected by the refugees themselves, with foundations of crude stone, walls of corrugated tin, and "roofs" of tarpaulin. The camp sat on a rutted, pestilential plain. It had rained the day before, and mud clung underfoot like paste. All around were mounds of refuse, clouds of flies, and a mood of utter dejection.

No readiness, however, to consider any change other than complete satisfaction for all claims could be detected in the *mukhtar* or headman of Shatila. This worthy, who hailed from a village near Acre where he had been a minor notable with some property, was now a kind of sheikh over the camp's composite tribe, and drawing pay from UNRWA as camp leader.

He had fled Palestine, he informed me, because the British and Americans had armed the Zionists and forced the Arabs out: "We had to retreat." In his particular case, he stated, the British army had helped him get away. Nevertheless, he insisted, British military aid and American gold gave victory to the Jews. He, and everyone else in the camp, he said, would never move out of there except back to Palestine: "If you were driven out of America, and they offered you \$200,000 to stay out, would you agree?" Suppose, I asked him, it became impossible to go back—would he be willing to accept help to begin a new life? He wanted help only to go home; if America and Britain did not help, the Arabs might turn to Russia. But did he know that the Jews were now quite strong? "Give us arms and we will drive them out." What did he know about present conditions in Palestine? Only that the Jews were persecuting his kinsmen. Had he heard that the nations of the world, especially America, were ready with money to develop new places for him and his people? Would he go perhaps to Jordan, if work and land awaited him there? He was scarcely listening now. The nations of the world made Partition, he said; they must now make the Zionists accept Partition; not his children, nor his children's

children, would go anywhere but back to Galilee.

Visiting Shatila months later, the novelist James T. Farrell obtained interviews substantially like mine. Alfred Lilienthal, that inexorable accuser of Israel, heard pretty much the same thing in 1954. Whatever changes may be taking place in the world outside, the mind of the Arab refugee has apparently not been reached by them.

ONE point has evaded, or not been sufficiently weighed by, most observers: the bizarre role of UNRWA itself—or at least of its agents in the field. These happen to be, almost to a man, themselves refugees.

The UNRWA agent who escorted me through Shatila was a Christian Arab, in a tailored suit, and spoke excellent English. On our way, he had discussed his "clients" in a breezy manner which I mistook for bureaucratic objectivity (or indifference). Anticipating my shocked reaction to Shatila, he had advised me in a bored voice that UNRWA and the Lebanese government had vainly tried to move the occupants to a better site only ten kilometers away: "These people simply won't budge." But as my talk with the *mukhtar* progressed, the agent began interjecting asides to me—and then translating them into Arabic for the *mukhtar*—which seemed more provocative than soothing. "If he took the \$200,000," the UNRWA man said when the *mukhtar* had inquired about my price for forgetting my country, "his throat would be cut that night. They are much better organized now than in 1948." He assured me (and the *mukhtar*) further: "Not a man, woman, or child would dare betray Palestine."

Did they know about the enormous changes in Israel that might make reintegration there difficult? "No refugee would be willing to listen," the agent replied. "It is his land, and he will go back even if it has been completely submerged under some Jewish irrigation scheme." But, I insisted, have the refugees been told? "It's not necessary. How would you feel, in our place!" (Here was the total identification, finally.) Was it true, I went on, that Radio Cairo and Radio Damascus—and Radio Tashkent, too—gave distorted reports about resettlement plans in order to discourage the refugees from accepting them? "Not to dis-

courage," he corrected, "but to *encourage* them to demand their return to Palestine before it is too late." But didn't UNRWA, at least, give them the truth? "The UN," he said grandly, "does not mix in politics. Its function is only relief and rehabilitation." "How many other Palestinians were working for UNRWA?" "We're all Palestinians—all of us in field contact with the refugees—and all the camp leaders, of course. . . ."

At the second camp, the "good" one, named Jisr el Pasha, I remarked that the new stone barracks looked permanent. "Don't say 'permanent,'" my UNRWA guide implored. "That might sound as if the people want to stay." By the time we had finished interviewing the local *mukhtar* and a few others, my UNRWA man was talking exactly like them. On our way back to Beirut, he said: "Until now we have been quiet because the UN has been saying we have the right to return. The Lebanese government says so, too. Otherwise, our people would have burned down Beirut by now. But if the UN believes the refugees can't be repatriated, it should say so. That would make the situation clear, and we would know what to do. We could not bomb New York or London—but we could help anyone who fought them. Anyway, not a drop of oil would get out. . . ."

Something, it may be suggested, appears out of kilter in this. UNRWA has long professed that the refugees ought to *know* what confronts them. Its 1955 report pointed out that most of them, when they demanded repatriation, were thinking of Palestine as they remembered it, not as it had become. The report frankly admitted inability to predict how many would still want to go back if they did know the truth. But it stressed that the refugees would continue clamoring for repatriation, and resisting other solutions, until they had a chance to make a choice between repatriation and resettlement in the full awareness that the former meant something "different from returning to their old homes and to their former ways of life," and that the latter offered benefits and compensations.

UNRWA has long held a mandate—and the funds—to spur resettlement projects. Last January, UNRWA complained that "unscrupulous political agitators" were poison-

ing the minds of the refugees and stirring them to open resistance to UNRWA.

Yet UNRWA recruits its field personnel, who keep it in direct liaison with the refugees—and thus exert the greatest immediate influence on them—from a group least likely to seek the solution that UNRWA itself presumably desires. Even non-Palestinian Arabs would make dubious liaison officers, given the intransigent attitude toward resettlement which general Arab policy takes, but there is an acute paradox in favoring Palestinian Arabs for these jobs, for they have the most to gain: (1) as jobholders, from keeping the problem unsolved and the job alive; and (2) as relatively cultured and once well-to-do inhabitants of Mandate Palestine, from using their brethren as weapons in the effort to regain their lost advantages. It may be economically justifiable to employ refugees wherever possible, but does it make political sense when it frustrates the larger objective?

How many refugees know that their old world in Palestine has disappeared? Can it be that they talk tough because they are kept in an ignorance which encourages them to be tough?

THE refugees, one often hears, are such a large and uncontrollable force that nobody in the Arab world dares provoke them. This proposition is open to inspection, but one thing is sure: when treated fearfully they can grow most fearsome.

I saw it in Jordan, winter before last, when mobs rose all over the country against a blundering British attempt to steer Jordan into the Baghdad Pact. The mobs contained students, Communists, and other elements—but their core was Palestinian.

With annexation, after Partition, of the Arab segment of Palestine (which the UN had voted to make an independent Arab state), Jordan's population of 500,000 tripled. A half-million of the new Jordanians were "West-Bankers" from the Palestine side of the river, another half-million were from what had become Israeli territory. Of these, some 150,000 were distributed in thirty UNRWA camps, and the others heavily concentrated in towns like Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jericho. Organized into a federation and connected by telephone, the camps maintained a "polit-

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ical action" headquarters in Amman, which had an estimated 70,000 resident refugees and West-Bankers of its own.

The crisis flared after four Palestinian members of the Jordanian cabinet—under stimulation from Nasser, King Saud, and the ex-Mufti of Jerusalem—resigned rather than consent to Jordan's entering the Baghdad Pact with "Israel-loving" Turkey and Iraq. When King Hussein entrusted the premiership of the new cabinet to a presumed friend of the Pact and of the British, the camps set up a "Secret Resistance Committee," and the rioting flared, mostly by Palestinian combustion. The Arab Legion, under orders not to shoot except in extreme jeopardy, used shields shaped like garbage-can covers to fend off rocks thrown at them. The soldiers threw the rocks back.

When a refugee delegation notified the young king that he might lose his crown, the government gave up. Its successor shelved the Baghdad Pact and granted the rioters' demands for dissolution of parliament and new elections. That week's mob activity not only spiked Britain's grand strategy of Arab alliances but kicked wide the door for the early and ignominious departure from Jordan of Britain herself.

"The situation," said one Western diplomat, privately, "is hopeless unless Jordan produces a leader with guts." Hardly a week later, the value of this commodity was briefly evident. A new government—the second since the riots—bravely decreed that parliament was not to be dissolved after all. The mob marched again. This time, the Arab Legion was authorized to act. Two tear-gas bombs were thrown. Bayonets were fixed to rifles. Writing after he had been cashiered—for other reasons—as Legion Commander, Sir John Bagot Glubb recalled the scene with relish: "The troops advanced steadily toward the seething mob. One hundred men against nearly 7,000 screaming lunatics. . . . Within a few minutes there was scarcely a rioter in sight. The line moved slowly forward through the town. There were no casualties. . . . Two companies of the Arab Legion had stopped the rising in twenty minutes. . . ."

But the government bowed to the dispersed rioters' demands anyway. New elections loaded parliament with Saudi and Egyptian agents and gave the premiership

to a pro-Nasser Palestinian. The situation was now truly "hopeless," by standard Arab measurements. And yet, let us remember, King Hussein challenged it—and reversed it. Neither the American Sixth Fleet nor the Eisenhower Doctrine saved Jordan. It was the nerve of the king—and his ability thereby to firm up the Bedouin loyalties of the confused Legion. (Arab awareness that the Israelis were ready to move should the Syrians and Iraqis rush in to "pacify" Jordan also had a salutary effect.)

Hussein adroitly made anti-Communism the issue, not pro-Westernism. He got mob credit by dressing his coup up as anti-Israeli and calling Tel Aviv an outpost of Moscow! But he did defy the riot manipulators and their cohorts in town, camp, and country. He planted a punch squarely on the nose of the refugees' darling, Colonel Nasser. And the only thing that happened was that he won everybody's respect and an extended lease on his throne. So much for the uncontrollability of the refugees.

It is generally "known" that the Arabs have not accepted an international Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) because they decline to enter into any agreement whatsoever with Israel, even a good one, lest they imply thereby that they admit her existence. This fear, which is diplomatic and genteel, is supposed to rest largely on the more basic fear, rudely physical, that any Arab government that makes such admission will be straightway toppled and its members butchered.

I talked with all the leading Arab engineers involved in the parleys with Eric Johnston (except the engineer from Jordan, who was not "at home" during the riots when I visited Amman). Each assured me that the Johnston Plan was excellent: it would do the refugees great good; it would do even more good to the economies of the refugee-host countries participating in the water, water power, and land development scheme.

Arab opposition to the Johnston Plan was loud and universal at first, while in some Israeli quarters Johnston was suspected of plotting the dismemberment of the Jewish state. But then, thanks to Johnston's great capacities as a negotiator and to the intrinsic merits of his plan, the Arabs

began to swing over. Their technicians, for one thing, knew that international control, putting a limit on the quantity of water each party might receive, would be advantageous to their side. Geography had already decreed that only a measurable quantity of water could be effectively absorbed by Arab soil within reach of the Jordan, but Israel, if no controls existed, could channel limitless amounts southward to the infinitely thirsty Negev. The Arabs also knew that the Israelis possessed the skills and determination—and might even acquire the money—to proceed with such projects as the B'not Yaakov diversion scheme, which could trap the Jordan for the Negev, and which the Arabs might not be able to block indefinitely if attempts at international control failed. (Conversely, at great expense and waste, the Arabs could conceivably tamper with or cut off the water for Israel.)

The Israelis, for their part, surprised the Arabs by exhibiting great reasonableness. They were willing to go better than halfway on many disputed points. They seemed prepared to take less than they might obtain from a water system of their own, or might expect if the issue were adjudicated by a World Court. Presumably, they were calculating that agreement on an international system would at last enable them to proceed on non-conflicting projects without Arab hindrance (and might even pry open the door to more Israeli-Arab live-and-let-live arrangements).

A WIDE area of negotiated agreement was achieved by mid-1955. Impossible opening bids by the Arabs for 85 per cent of the water, and by the Israelis for 65 per cent, simmered down to an approximate 60-65 per cent share for Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, and 35-40 per cent for Israel. The Israelis abandoned their original argument that Lebanon's Litani River, which flows virtually unused into the Mediterranean, should be harnessed to the regional plan. All were agreed on where the water should be stored and the canals should run, on the location and size of dams and power and pumping stations, and on a supra-national authority over the entire project. Construction and supervision would be financed by a UN (largely U.S.) fund commencing with \$200 million.

But all this was only a "technical agreement." Recommended by the experts, it was informally approved by the foreign ministers of the various states affected. On the Arab side, the plan had to be ratified at an October-scheduled meeting of the Arab League, in whose name the Arab technical board had been parleying.

Numerous justifications have been offered for the abrupt change of heart shown by the Arabs at that meeting. Many of their leaders blamed a speech made by Secretary Dulles in August 1955. It put the Jordan Valley scheme into the frame of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement, toward which the Secretary of State offered large American financial aid. One of Johnston's major gambits with the Arabs had been that the plan had no strings and need not bring the Arabs an inch closer to the Israelis than they desired. Once again, it seemed, the Secretary was blandly ignoring advisors (Johnston among them) and showing an amazingly bad sense of timing. In his defense, however, it should be noted that he was, after all, only stating the principal and obvious motive for American interest in the Johnston Plan. Why else should we be spending so much money and effort, if not to reduce Middle East tensions?

In the end it was Syria, after finally keeping a government in power long enough to send a delegation to the Arab League, that closed the matter by proposing to the meeting that the Plan be tabled, which was done. While this did not quite kill the Plan, it certainly sent it into a protracted coma. And shortly after the League meeting closed, the view prevailing in high Arab circles had become that no JVA could be realistically contemplated until the refugee problem—which JVA was supposed to help in solving—had itself been solved!

All this would suggest a formidable amount of economic and social irresponsibility on the part of Arab leadership. A prime minister or a mob chieftain may persuade himself and his backward constituents that "national honor" is more essential than relief of misery, but in the upshot Arabs have tended to be more the victims than beneficiaries of such a policy, winning neither honor nor material advantages in the process.

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tute of the Arab states. The Johnston Plan, according to all expert opinion, would do more than benefit refugees; it would bestow prodigious advantages on Jordan's entire economy and reach to every inhabitant.

Even before the incorporation of the Palestinians, Jordan was unable to support her own people, and subsisted only through heavy British financial support. Half the newcomers were unproductive and indigent. Already in 1949, the general poverty was so great that, for the first time any living Jordanian could recall, no pilgrimage to Mecca was undertaken that year. Non-refugee Jordanians became largely indistinguishable from refugees in their chronic unemployment. The self-imposed loss of the Israeli market, the blunders of Amman's economic policies, bad harvests, and other misfortunes have sped the further deterioration of Jordan's position. To make matters worse, she arbitrarily cut herself off from her literally vital \$33 million annual British subsidy, and left herself dependent instead on contributions from Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. To date, only King Saud has made good—there is some reason to believe that even this was a disguised American subsidy—and most of the rest has been supplied by a direct subsidy from the U. S. Treasury amounting to an estimated \$30 million in economic and military aid. We have thus in effect taken over where the British left off.

Glubb Pasha was remarkably silent on such matters while he was at ease in Amman. Since his exodus, however, even he has stoutly recommended that a forceful land and water development program, making no distinction between refugees and other citizens but aiming to raise the whole economic level, is imperative for Jordan's survival. This is precisely what the Johnston Plan would be.

FOR refugees in particular, whose fate has rightly been a source of world concern, the JVA would provide hope, work, land, water, and a new life. This year UNRWA is seeking some \$40 million merely to keep the refugees alive without any amelioration of their lot. Over \$200 million has already been poured down the same drain. In Jordan alone, the number of births in the refugee community exceeds deaths by some 13,000

annually. As one UNRWA official wryly told me: "We haven't stood still, we've been moving rapidly backwards." The Johnston Plan would lift the problem out of its stagnation. Even allowing for land distribution to others, it is minimally estimated that 100,000 refugees would be able to move from barren camps to fertile farms. Since it takes one non-farmer to provide economic services for each active farmer, the number of people accommodated on new Jordanian land would mount to 200,000 at least.

Critics will be quick to object that 200,000 falls far short of the total number of refugees. This number happens to be one of the most elastic in statistical history, ranging from scarcely a half million by original Israeli count, through 600,000 by UNRWA estimate in 1949, and 922,279 by the latest UNRWA reckoning, to the round and sonorous figure of one million, which is the one that has been long favored by Arab orators. It is notorious that refugee camp leaders swell their lists—and rations—by retaining the names of dead and by multiple recording of new-born; that innumerable non-refugees have attached themselves to these lists; and that Arab governments have not made an accurate UNRWA census easy.

However low the correct count, advocates of the Johnston Plan have never pretended that it would take care of *all* refugees. But it certainly would begin a movement away from the camps. By setting up distant jobs and resettlement sites, it would tend to instill a psychology of motion in place of immobility—and give great impetus to other resettlement possibilities.

Implementation of the Johnston Plan presupposes a willingness on the part of Arab governments to cooperate. If so, there is no lack of projects that could eliminate the refugee problem altogether. UNRWA in 1955, together with Egypt's National Production Council, proposed bringing Nile water to Northwestern Sinai in a ten-year development program of desert land that would ultimately absorb up to 75,000 new settlers. The Nasser regime slowed this project down by demanding that it be tied in with the dictator's pet scheme, the Aswan Dam. Since the time when the latter fell into abeyance and especially since her defeat in Sinai itself, Egypt has shown no willingness to proceed with the Sinai proj-

ect. But according to competent specialists, it remains eminently practical.

Syria, as Senator Hubert H. Humphrey reported after a recent study mission, is under-populated and could "assimilate a substantial number of refugees with benefit to itself." David Ben Gurion once aptly described Syria as "an empty country." Her Jezirah district, between the Euphrates and the Turkish border, could with relatively little outlay be improved to take at least a quarter million additional rural inhabitants. Given Arab willingness, international financing for projects like the Jezirah and Sinai would surely be forthcoming.

In Iraq the problem is not money but people. Out of her fabulous oil royalties, Iraq's Development Board currently gets an average *annual minimum* budget of \$250 million to spend on flood control, irrigation, electric power, and other projects large and small. To begin to make adequate use of these improvements as they are progressively introduced, Iraq's present population of five million will need to be doubled—by immigration of refugees from Palestine.

IRAQ's immigration problem for the moment is mainly theoretical. But in Israel an average of 8,000 newcomers, fugitive and otherwise, has arrived each current month from European and Arab countries. The bulk of this great flood can be channeled only southward into the undeveloped Negev, which must look mainly to the Jordan and its tributaries for water. Israel is therefore waxing increasingly impatient with Arab obstructionism. Admittedly, expansion of water output from the North—such as the 65-mile Yarkon-Negev pipelines, which will increase Israel's irrigable area by an estimated 25 per cent, and the Negev's farm population by 35,000 souls in three years—goes steadily forward. Work on auxiliary installations that could be integrated in an international water system, if and when ratified, has never ceased. Recently an Export-Import Bank mission has been in Israel to see what justification there is for a \$75 million loan she has requested, mainly for development of further irrigation from the Yarkon and Kishon rivers independently of the Jordan.

But the Jordan remains the major, and indispensable, future source of Israeli irrigation, according to all competent neutral

surveys. Meanwhile most of the precious Jordan continues to flow unused into the Dead Sea instead of creating power and irrigation in the Arab lands in the Valley and in the Israeli Negev. Periodically, Ben Gurion or another Israeli spokesman issues a solemn warning that this situation cannot be tolerated forever. With equal vehemence, Arab spokesmen respond with threats of war if the Israelis dare proceed independently. These threats are not frightening, but Israel would incur American displeasure if she took them up. On the other hand, the Israelis continue to insist on their readiness ultimately to compensate resettled Arab refugees for abandoned property, and the U. S. is willing to help finance this promise. Ben Gurion is even reported lately by Senator Humphrey to have assured him that Israel will admit "a limited number" of refugees if these will pledge their loyalty (this would presuppose genuine abandonment of hostility to Israel among the Arab states, thereby eliminating the reason a Fifth Column is feared in Israel).

According to Egyptian and Syrian "press reports," prospects for Arab-Israeli rapprochement on the refugee question are good—in Jordan and Lebanon. These reports speak of secret negotiations of Quisling Arabs with top-level Israelis to sell out the refugees by closing their camps and herding them off to desert exile. The object of such "reports" is, clearly, to stir up trouble in the refugee centers of those Arab countries that have not lately been toeing Nasser's line.

More interesting are guarded reports from the West of contacts between Israeli and Arab agents in Italy. As yet, no hard evidence has presented itself that something new is brewing. Such contacts are of long standing. It was through them, for example, that the way was cleared some years back for Israel's decision to unfreeze refugee accounts in Israeli banks. There are grounds for supposing that certain Arab leaders may now be more inclined to talk about larger matters, but there are no actual indications that such discussions are further along in Rome or elsewhere than a year or two ago.

Tangible progress, according to realistic appraisers of Arab political habits, must depend on the rate at which Arab regimes become convinced that protracted refusal to negotiate will pay diminishing returns and

even incur penalties. In a large sense, this calls for a course of re-education by the international community—the re-education not alone of Arabs, but of the international community itself on the subject of Arabs.

THE history of a phrase in the General Assembly resolution of December 11, 1948, which established the fruitless Palestine Conciliation Commission, illustrates the liabilities of the soft approach to the Middle Eastern mind. As Mizra Khan in *Midstream* (Spring 1956) has impressively shown, the root of much trouble lay in the provision of Paragraph 11 that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and *live at peace with their neighbors* should be permitted to do so at the earliest *practicable* date, and that compensation should be paid for property of those choosing not to return” (Mr. Khan’s italics).

The PCC was instructed to help the Arab states and Israel “achieve a final settlement of all questions outstanding between them” and “facilitate the economic development of the area.” These parts of the resolution the Arabs have ignored. But the part about the refugees’ “return to their homes” has been vested by the Arabs with the sanctity of Koranic law. UN failure to clarify its meaning at the outset, or rewrite the passage when its evils were becoming evident, has only hardened Arab recalcitrance. One can hardly blame the General Assembly for having honored the principle, essentially just, that a desire of refugees to return should be recognized. This desire, the paragraph intended, might be satisfied if the prescribed conditions of “living at peace” and of “practicability”—in the atmosphere of conciliation envisaged by the PCC—were attained. The Arabs have consistently rejected them. The Arabs have stripped the resolution of all its provisions except the few naked words on which they base the “legality” of their adamant doctrines of “repatriation,” “compensation,” and “choice.”

Responsible opinion within the UN and outside has by now recognized the original error, and simply pleads for resettlement in Arab countries. Yet, as Mr. Khan points out, the UN itself has continued to pay lip service to Paragraph 11 in subsequent, increasingly wistful efforts to espouse resettlement “without prejudice” to repatriation

claims. Indeed, early attempts to argue the Arabs away from repatriation avoided the word “resettlement” entirely. In 1949 an Anglo-Franco-Turkish survey mission for PCC, headed by TVA chief Gordon R. Clapp, proposed work instead of relief—but spoke timidly of “refugee employment projects,” not of “resettlement projects.” The UNRWA, born of the Clapp Report, was enjoined to seek “the termination of international assistance for relief,” but it was handed a small-scale work project program to create jobs rather than close camps.

The program failed, anyway, because of Arab non-cooperation. Other UNRWA programs, renewed and even expanded, also have failed—because they all bore in them the seed of their ruin by continuing to affirm that the camp inmates still had the right to *choose* to go home. A fund of \$200 million for large-scale projects to integrate the refugees into the Arab economies stands largely untouched, while funds for mere relief are gobbled up before their time. And though the U. S. is convinced that resettlement is the only feasible solution, and considers the Johnston Plan designed to achieve it, Mr. Johnston himself had constantly to assure the Arabs that the right of repatriation would remain intact.

TO MANY observers, the present moment may be the right one for the U. S., along with other governments that desire Arab-Israeli peace, to change the tune. Nasser’s prospects for uniting the Arab world never looked slimmer. His grip is loosening even on Egypt, where his arrests of real or alleged conspirators in high places or high repute betray his growing uneasiness. King Saud is maneuvering against Egypt. Jordan and Syria revile each other daily. Damascus, going in the direction of the Kremlin’s lethal embrace, is being increasingly abhorred by other Arab capitals, and seems even to be making its Cairo ally queasy. The Baghdad Pact is taking on new life—and the Arab League is more fictional than ever. Lebanon’s pro-Western elements have won a landslide victory in parliament. And Hussein in Jordan feels strong enough after his victory over the Nasserite-Communist-refugee opposition to accept large cash donations from “imperialist” Washington.

Observers, moreover, are encouraged by

signs that the U. S., despite some wavering, is beginning to take a realistically firm line against Nasser, the Syrian colonels, and Moscow. They would like to see this line extended to *all* aspects of the Arab-Israeli deadlock. Arab propaganda that solution of the refugee problem would remove the obstacles to peace should be rejected. Refugees are an effect of Arab hostility, not a cause. The calendar shows blood and death in Palestine long before the Arab exodus. Clearly, no refugee settlement of any nature would be physically possible without explicit Arab reconciliation to the fact of Israel's existence.

One may almost be forgiven for looking back wishfully to the days immediately following the Israeli sweep into Sinai last autumn, before (and without) the Anglo-French fiasco at Suez. It must now seem, to many, that then was the golden opportunity for the firm approach to Arab dilemmas.

Is it so unreasonable to conjecture that a complete rout of Nasser by Israel, unaided, would have touched off a series of salutary shake-ups in the Arab world that would have changed many people's views and made many solutions of hitherto insoluble problems seem possible? Who knows but that Arab leaders might have come to the fore not afraid to adopt a new approach to Israel, now that implacability toward her had been shown to have so many liabilities?

The opportunity has passed. The lesser possibilities that remain, however, should not be shrugged away. In assessing them, one ought to reexamine the dogma that all Arab politicians are the prisoners of refugee and other anti-Israel fanatics, and hence dare not negotiate with Israel.

Whatever truth there is in this notion, dread of the refugees' vengeance does not seem to be great enough to prevent the same Arab regimes that profess to fear them from treating them badly, very badly. This is a known fact. Not only do Arab governments evade their own obligations toward the refugees. (The UN pays the relief with funds more than 70 per cent of which come from American taxpayers.) Not only do they obstruct UNRWA's efforts by harassing its officials, by charging excessively for warehouse and other local services, and even by profiting from tariffs on imports for refugee use—as UNRWA frequently protests. They

also discriminate against the refugees by barring them at times from the local labor market, by preventing their passage across other Arab borders, by limiting their political rights, and by frustrating all projects which might permit them to integrate themselves outside Israel. As one UNRWA official has publicly attested, "Arab leaders don't give a damn whether the refugees live or die."

SUCH policies suggest that the Arab governments deliberately, and with impunity, exploit the plight of the refugees in order to play on world sympathy and to keep hatred for Israel alive in the Arab masses. The game has been brilliantly successful. "There are some 40 million refugees in the world," Professor Milton Konvitz once pointedly wrote, "... some 800,000 Roman Catholic refugees from North Vietnam . . . in Hong Kong alone about 800,000 refugees from Red China . . . yet who hears about them. But who has not heard about the 800,000 Arab refugees?"

But some Arab leaders are beginning to wish they never had such a trump card. Lebanon, for example, where the Arab Christians are barely managing to hold their slight edge in political power, has long been worried by the prospect of having the predominantly Moslem mass of her refugees permanently settled on her soil. This threat was made vivid by the violence and unruliness of the refugees in Lebanon's recent elections. The pro-Western parties won handsomely, despite the disorders, but the Beirut government may now be more eager than before to clean up its refugee problem.

Awareness that refugees are not an unmixed blessing is possibly even more acute in Jordan, where their ratio to the native population is much higher than in Lebanon, and where their demonstrated capacity for making trouble is so much greater. Amman and Beirut now know that only Nasser and the Syrians can benefit from the presence of refugees on Jordanian and Lebanese soil, and that they are a threat locally to any government that incurs Cairo's displeasure.

A further incentive to possible change in Arab policy toward the refugee question is the serious social problem created by the phenomenon of refugee stagnation. A growing number of thoughtful Arabs are realizing that the return of the refugees to Israel

in numbers large enough to make a real difference is highly doubtful. If so, the cumulative effects of the abnormal living conditions in the refugee centers become of grave concern to the countries in which these centers are located. The average adult refugee has been encouraged to be dependent, shiftless, and resentful. The longer he is kept where he is the more difficult it will be to convert him into a productive citizen when the world stops paying his keep.

Refugee children offer an even more troubling problem. Fully half the refugee population today is under fifteen years of age. They do not remember, or have never seen, Palestine. They have no roots there. But they have not grown roots in the countries of their dispersion. Thanks to international, non-Arab aid, they enjoy a higher rate of literacy than any other sizeable group in the Arab world. But the communities in which they live provide no adequate outlets for the abilities fostered by education. Nor are charity, hand-to-mouth employment, and enforced idleness likely to prepare them adequately for the different kind of life which must lie ahead. No Arab leader with even a primitive sense of responsibility can forever blind himself to the somber prospects for his country in terms of unrest, political and social.

ISRAEL, too, must find an end to the Arab refugee problem, for the sake not only of justice but also of water and peace.

In the conflict of basic claims between two sides it would be futile to seek a verdict dispensing absolute justice. Waldo Frank, in his new book *Bridgehead: The Drama of Israel*, shows how, for every solid justification which the Israelis or the Arabs advance for their attitude toward Jewish statehood on Palestinian soil, the other side can present a counter-justification equally solid and equally founded in history and ethics. In almost the same manner, depending on the conflicting facts which one selects as premises, a powerful theoretical case can be developed for banishing the refugee Arabs forever or bringing them all back.

But events have made certain things irreversible. One has to seek not abstract justice but the avoidance of more injustice than has already been committed. If we consider all present circumstances, and then select

one circumstance the elimination of which would surely engender greater evil than its continuation, we are compelled to select the fact of the existence of Israel. We do not have to agree that the Arab case is as immaculate as its champions pretend in order to admit that Israel is human too, and hence not without guilt. But whatever atonement she might make, Israel cannot be asked to redeem herself by self-destruction.

Automatically and immediately, this rules out the possibility, for the mass of Arab refugees, of repatriation to Israel. The hatred for Israel which has been baked into the refugees' bones; the sharp economic and social conflicts that would arise between Arab returnees and Jewish settlers who were themselves new immigrants—these and other hazards are too well known and genuine for elaboration here. They would bring chaos. The essential point is that Israel could not tolerate being put in such jeopardy, and nobody can justifiably condemn her for refusing to be put in it.

But even if they had the power to enforce their demand for mass repatriation, what would be the good of it by now to the refugees themselves? Would it be better for them than the alternatives of resettlement that are now available?

Unless Israel's destruction as a state had already occurred or were pending, the returning Arabs would be plunged into misery just as great as that which would be visited on the Jews. At best, they would have to enter a new phase of transit and camps, waiting their turn like other new arrivals, and exceedingly less equipped by nature, temper, and conditioning for the trials that still confront every immigrant in Israel.

They could have no hope of regaining their former way of life, for the plain and irrefutable reason that it had physically vanished—its economy, its goods and chattels, even most of its towns, villages, and dwellings. To quote Glubb Pasha again, since he now at last can be accorded some credit as a witness: "Even if the Israeli government were compelled to accept [the refugees], their lives would undoubtedly soon become unbearable and the refugees would themselves before long be asking to re-emigrate."

Even passionate non-Arab advocates of repatriation concede that the refugees would

probably be better off elsewhere than in Israel—also, it should be stressed, *elsewhere than in their present camps* and in the immediate environs of those camps.

UNRWA has noted that opportunities for work “are especially scarce in the areas in which most of the refugees live.” This does not mean, incidentally, that the refugees are physically worse off than non-refugees. UNRWA has testified that, thanks to “satisfactory” nutrition and first-rate social and medical services, they are more fortunate than many of the native-born around them, and “in some cases better off than they were in Palestine.” On the outskirts of wealthy Beirut I saw a hill where a colony of itinerant Kurdish laborers, with their families and their goats, were living in caves.

But reasonable subsistence in physical terms is still no compensation for the creeping apathy that accompanies refugee existence. In the camps, James Farrell writes, “human dignity is offended day after day.” The refugee, confused, bitter, a helpless pawn in a conflict beyond his understanding, is indeed a tragic figure who merits compassion. This does not mean, however, that he must be listened to and followed in his ignorance or gratified in his folly—particularly when the alternative he demands would only bring further injustice upon him.

THE key to the dilemma lies in making the refugee *understand*. He must come to see truly that his dream of return to a vanished Arab Palestine is empty and futile, and that his life on UN-developed land would be better than any he has ever known before. Senator Humphrey is right, of course, when he urges the creation of a UN Good Offices Commission and a Middle East Development Agency to facilitate a solution of the refugee problem through large projects and vigorous negotiation. But he misses the main point when he omits any provision for reaching and informing the real clients—not just the Arab leaders, but the refugees themselves.

There are possibilities of making the Arab refugees achieve a full comprehension of the nature of their plight. Significant examples are on record. Mr. Khan cites the Arab Jerusalem journal *Falastin* as asking: “What have the Arab rulers done [for the refugees] these past eight years? Is their

ray of hope to be found in the politicians’ haggling at our expense? Or is it in the execution of the Johnston Plan and of the Sinai Project?” Another Arab newspaper, *Difa*, has said: “We refugees have left our homes merely to enter a world of intrigue on the part of those who are our own flesh and blood.” The minds of the refugees have been regimented against compromise, but UNRWA has often noted the readiness of individual refugees to accept jobs which take them out of the camps, and even to seek work directly from the Agency in the hope of achieving self-support. A refugee movement was spontaneously—but abortively—launched in one camp to petition King Hussein to support the Johnston Plan.

The basic requirement is to turn such fitful gleams of light into a full and steady blaze of illumination. This cannot be done piecemeal, or with the refugees alone. The light must also shine fiercely in the capitals of their host countries, and on the UN—and on Washington.

The UN, first of all, must boldly discard the stultifying proviso, as noted above, that its resettlement projects are “without prejudice” to the vision of repatriation. When not sabotaged by such timidity, the threat that relief will be cut off can be potent. We have as authority for this none other than the Egyptian press, which once admitted that Cairo agreed to cooperate in the Sinai resettlement project only in order to avoid the early stoppage of relief. Continuance of the “right-of-repatriation” myth works directly counter to the drive for resettlement. When tacked on to loud warnings about ultimate cessation of relief, the myth of “free choice to return” only helps the refugees believe that the UN is still bluffing.

There should be no compromise here, not even to the extent of retaining the notion of a “token” repatriation. This device, to which certain governments and many piously intentioned friends of Israel are wedded, would have Israel take back a limited number of refugees as token of her good faith. But how large a number proves good faith? Which refugees would be selected, and how? Would they not be regarded by their fellows as an elite—thereby stirring up needless jealousy, making repatriation seem spuriously attractive, and encouraging those left behind to wait instead of resettling?

The chance of success does not lie in petty stratagems, but in the boldest stratagem of all: a clean break with all equivocation; a firm and decisive proclamation that the world is ready to help the refugees build a new and better life, but not a futile old one; full and unwavering publicity about this readiness, and its meaning, to all Arab countries and to all Arab refugees; and enlistment of the entire UNRWA personnel for such a campaign, even at the cost of replacing those agents in the field who would prefer to preach an opposite course.

AN END should be made, moreover, to the habit of chiding Israel for not offering generous sacrifices to eliminate the refugee deadlock. She—and the refugees—need protection from those earnest but half-informed friends of Israel (including many Jews) who perennially urge her to stretch out her hand more than halfway toward the Arabs. These friends advise her not only to take back a "limited number" of refugees *before* mass resettlement, but also to return to the Arabs some of her territory lying outside the original Partition line and even some lying inside it. And they also urge Israel to proceed to make compensation for abandoned Arab property without waiting for concessions in exchange.

The fact is that Israel has stretched out her hand more than once before, with no result except to get it bitten. She has paid off \$6 million on Arab bank accounts, and has been maligned for it. She has accepted some 33,000 returnees and infiltrates, only to see other infiltrates arrive with knife and bomb. She even proposed at one time to take back up to 100,000 refugees, an offer which was spurned, and to pay compensation for abandoned property apart from a total peace settlement—an offer which she has since made conditional upon cessation of the Arab boycott and blockade.

Israel's record is not blameless, but the few gestures she has made in redress have only stimulated the Arab tendency to take more and give less. Those who urge her to continue conceding should ponder the likeli-

hood that further concessions will only work further mischief. (Said Radio Cairo as recently as July 19: "The fact that Israel is trying to solve the refugee problem proves she has an interest in solving it—and this alone is reason enough to rule out any such attempt by us. . . .") The Arab leaders must first realize that Israel will not vanish, and the refugee masses must realize that their wholesale repatriation is unthinkable. The first concession—the concession of comprehension—must be made by the Arabs. Otherwise, concession by Israel will only be interpreted by them as new "proof" that Israel is weak and afraid—and as encouragement to go on dreaming of her final destruction.

It will surely be objected by some that such a program for Arab re-education is "naive" and "impractical." The Arabs, one will be told, will recoil in fanatic fury—and the UN will recoil timidly in advance of such a prospect. This writer believes that the only party in the dispute who must not recoil is the government of the United States. Once Washington acquires sufficient resolution to stand firm, the UN can be persuaded by Washington to muster the necessary courage. In actual fact, majority opinion inside the UN has long been weary of the interminable cost of refugee relief, and has been convinced that resettlement is the only way out. (In any case, without the top-heavy American contribution to the relief chest, the chest would quickly go empty.)

As for the Arabs, the only line of action that can be predicted for them with certainty is that they will not yield to soft entreaty; they will go on despising the entreaters. Since this approach to the Arabs has already been tried, with near-disastrous consequences, it would seem best to try a different one now. History provides substantial grounds for anticipating less than catastrophe from a bold front toward the Arabs. The rise of American prestige in Jordan, where during the recent crisis we were for once resolute instead of imploring, is only the latest evidence that the Arabs continue, as throughout their history, to respect those who stand straight and walk bravely.